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Small Arms Dealer Careful About Law

(New York Times News Service)

At the age of 5, Samuel Cummings learned to dismantle and reassemble a souvenir World War I German machine gun.

He believes that was the start of his career. In any case, this boyhood fascination and a robust entrepreneurial spirit have helped make him the world's leading private arms merchant.

Cummings is the founder, owner and president of the International Armaments Corporation, which has seventeen affiliates and subsidiaries in non-Communist countries.

Boyish Face

Cummings is a portly man with a boyish face that continually breaks into a smile as he describes the ironies of the arms trade. His sense of humor is keen but somewhat macabre, his gregariousness is contagious, and he is remarkably candid about his work.

He does not intrigue against Balkan and Southeast Asian governments and he scorns the idea that successful arms salesmen spend most of their time smuggling guns to revolutionaries at night in unmarked aircraft.

Cummings observes the legalities scrupulously and makes no sales that are not approved in advance by the British or American governments, or both in instances of political sensitivity.

"It would be stupid for us to

violate the law," he said. "There's very little money in smuggling. The profits are in the legal sales."

Lives In Monaco

For tax purposes, Cummings lives in Monaco with his Swiss wife, Irma, and their children. He supervises his company's operations from a 13-room apartment and office there when he is not traveling on business, as he is six to eight months of the year.

The bulk of his business consists of buying and reselling surplus small arms to sportsmen, collectors and non-Communist armies and police forces.

Cummings handles about 250,000 small arms a year, about 80 per cent of the British and American business. He also arranges sales of larger items, such as tanks and jet fighters, from one country to another for a commission.

His sales volume, he says, runs to eight figures, but is well under \$100,000,000 a year.

Just Take Advantage

"We just take advantage of the world's perpetual arms race," he said, explaining that the new weapons rolling off the production lines are continually creating new surpluses.

Cummings was born in Philadelphia on February 4, 1927, to a family that lost its money in the stock market crash of 1929. His father died a few years later, but his mother went to work in a real-estate firm and put her son through the Episcopal Academy there.

His boyhood fascination with arms made him an expert by the time he was a teenager. When he entered the Army toward the end of World War II, he immediately impressed his superiors and was made a sergeant instructor.

Worked For CIA

After his graduation from George Washington University, he worked for the Central Intelligence Agency for a short time during the Korean War but soon became bored. His job was to identify the design of North Korean weapons from photographs.

He then went to work for the small Western Arms Corporation, of Los Angeles, which caters to sportsmen and collectors, as their European and South American arms buyer at a salary of \$5,600 a year and one eighth of 1 per cent commission.

Within two years he had saved \$25,000 and was ready to go into business for himself. His first transaction was a purchase of 7,000 surplus small arms from Panama, which he resold to his former employer for a small profit.

Bought And Resold

He then began buying at giveaway prices and reselling the tens of thousands of surplus World War II arms in Europe. He had noticed the masses of captured German weapons in the hands of the allies there during his travels for Western Arms.

In 1956 he negotiated his first major deal, the sale to the former Dominican dictator, Rafael Trujillo, of \$3,500,000 worth of Swedish-owned Vampire jet fighters for a handsome commission.

"I was down selling Mr. Trujillo some .50-caliber anti-aircraft guns," Cummings said, "when he asked if we had any jets available."

Collects Old Weapons

"I said I thought we could arrange it," Cummings said, "and we did."

Cummings neither smokes nor drinks and confines any extravagances to collecting rare old weapons.

He points out that despite the substantial volume of his sales, he is a "midget" alongside the Government salesmen who control the vast volume of the post World War II arms business.

"Nowadays," said Cummings, "the arms merchants of the past, we hardly count."

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